



Press Release

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Naval Air Facility (NAF) Atsugi Public Affairs



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Bon Odori Festival

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NAVAL AIR FACILITY ATSUGI, Japan – More than 20,000 Japanese locals, Sailors and their families filled Taylor Field on Naval Air Facility (NAF) Atsugi for an evening of cultural sharing, food and friendship.

NAF Atsugi hosted its annual open base event to celebrate Obon, a Japanese-Buddhist traditional holiday. The day started off at 2 p.m. with Morale, Welfare and Recreation's (MWR) American Festival, supporting dozens of organizations from base offering a variety of classic American foods such as turkey legs, chili dogs and beef kabobs. Local band "Sweet Child" provided entertainment throughout the afternoon, while families were encouraged to play games and enjoy the bounce houses.

"Since NAF Atsugi is surrounded by a fence and isn't easily accessible for the locals, some locals can feel some anxious curiosity [about the base]," said Ikumi Tanaka, a member of the base Host Nation Relations Office.

"A military base is not just there for a military mission, it must also become a bridge between the host nation and US Forces Japan (USFJ). It is important to welcome the locals to open base events to offer some transparency and enhance trust," Tanaka said. Many locals posted their "thank you" messages on our Japanese Facebook page. According to the messages, they

enjoyed the American atmosphere, creating friendships and memories with the military members.

As the day went on, guests saw a melding of the two cultures as the American Festival turned into Bon Odori Festival at 5 p.m. kicking off with a Mikoshi – or portable shrine – Parade. This was followed by the NAF Atsugi Taiko Kids performance, playing both modern and traditional songs on the Taiko, which led to the Pom Pom Dancing by the NAF Atsugi Bon Odori Dancers.

“When the children play Taiko they become ‘Little Ambassadors.’ and demonstrate respect to the local culture by playing the drums with Japanese songs,” said Tanaka. “The locals understand how hard it is to play Taiko to Japanese songs, especially when Japanese is not their native language. I believe the locals really appreciated the performance.”

From 6 p.m., the festival finally filled its namesake with the dancers performing the Bon Odori, ending the night with a special appearance from the JMSDF Chidori Ren, who dance Awa Odori. Throughout the evening, there were 20 different dances performed, many of which had audience members joining around the yagura stage. At Shortly after 8 p.m., the eventful day concluded with a fireworks show.

“This was honestly such an awesome experience and while I’m beating myself up for not being able to make it last year, I’m so glad I could this time since I won’t be attached to NAF Atsugi in time for the next one,” said Logistics Specialist 2nd Class Robert Miller, from Anacortes, Wash.. “It was so awesome to see so many locals here and to be able to interact with them. It can be intimidating to go out off base and try to interact with our neighbors, so to be able to bring them on base and be together here where we’re comfortable is a good opportunity. As interested as they must be in the Americans behind the gate, I am, and I’m sure others are, just as interested in them and the culture surrounding us.”

While they do not come around very often, these open base events allow the Sailors of NAF Atsugi, the locals who visit from the neighboring communities and all over Japan, to come together, build bonds, friendships, and memories that can last for years to come.